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ABSTRACT

A series of five video-cassettes showing children from ages three to eight years was developed for use in an undergraduate developmental psychology course. Each cassette was viewed on an optional basis, with extra credit toward student's final grade awarded for viewing. Study guides accompanied each cassette. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the video-cassette system suggested positive results in terms of overall participation, perceived quality of the cassettes, and value in improving understanding of the course. The elective nature of the cassette program was preferred. (Author)

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Use of Video-cassette Summaries of Childhood in Teaching Developmental Psychology

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One of the major problems in teaching an undergraduate course in developmental psychology (with a definite child-adolescent orientation) is the difficulty in providing students with real-life observations of the principles and content presented in the course. An ideal solution to this problem would be to simply put the undergraduates on a bus, find the target population of children under study, and point out the salient examples of development related to previous class discussions. However, being a realist, the present author is aware of the logistical problems inherent in arranging for the field study of children. In an effort to satisfy the need for direct observation of children, it was decided that a system of video-cassettes of children at varying developmental levels would be in order.

With the assistance of a locally developed Faculty Mini-Grant for the Improvement of Instruction, the organization and development of the video-cassette system became a reality. This paper is an attempt to explain the goals, methods, and results of the video-cassette system.

Project Goals

The primary intent of the video-cassette project was to achieve the following goals:

1. To improve comprehension of the principles of developmental psychology by providing greater exposure to observations of children.
2. To increase the number and variety of observations of children in order to demonstrate the principle of individual differences in rates of development in children.
3. To demonstrate the orderly, but non-linear process of developmental change from the preschool period into middle childhood.
4. To provide developmental psychology students with an opportunity to observe the parents of young children and parental interpretations of child development patterns.

Method

The project director developed five 30-minute video-cassettes of children 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 years of age. During the Summer of 1977 the five children were selected from towns adjacent to the State University College in Fredonia, New York. All children selected were in the normal range of development, with none demonstrating any notable physical, mental, or emotional handicap. Children were also selected for their ability to relate well with the child interviewer (project director) and to sustain their attention for a 30-minute period. The children selected were each given a five-dollar honorarium for their participation.

Each child and his or her mother were taped in a child observation room using a video camera hidden behind a one-way mirror so as not to distract the participant. Generally, the child was taped for approximately 25 minutes performing tasks related to cognitive, social, language, motor, and affective development. Included among the tasks for some of the children were Piagetian conservation activities, Minnesota Preschool Scale

items, measures of sex role stereotyping, attitude toward school surveys, moral development dilemmas, and a variety of other structured and semi-structured tasks. During the last five minutes, the mother of each child was interviewed concerning such topics as the child's past health, early childhood experiences, relationships with siblings, adjustment to school, and temperamental style.

All five tapes were then edited with the assistance of the College's Instructional Resources Center and were transferred onto 30-minute video-cassettes for final use. In addition, the project director developed five 4-page study guides for the completed cassettes. The study guides were developed to assist students in interpreting the cassettes and to require them to integrate class lecture and assigned readings with the child observations.

The five video-cassettes were available for student viewing during the last third of the Fall, 1977, and Spring, 1978, semesters. Each cassette was shown for a one-week period, with 10 showings per week. The showings were conducted in a room reserved by the project director for the entire academic year, with a seating capacity of 15 students. Students could earn up to two points for viewing each cassette, with one point for viewing and one point for satisfactorily completing the study guide. The students were given a ditto sheet describing the entire video-cassette system prior to the initial showing. The students were told that they could view all, some, or none of the cassettes and that regularly scheduled examinations would not include material presented in the cassettes.

Results

In analyzing the results, the project director conducted separate analyses for the Fall, 1977, and Spring, 1978, semesters. The results were

based on a Video-cassette Evaluation Form which was distributed to all students at the time of their final examination. Since there was 100% attendance at these examinations, it proved to be an optimal time. Students were instructed to complete their form anonymously and pass it in after completing their examination.

Concerning the extent of student participation in the video-cassette project for the undergraduate developmental psychology students, 79% of the 103 Fall, 1977, students and 86% of the 91 Spring, 1978, students viewed one or more of the cassettes. In order to assess the content quality of each of the five cassettes, the students were asked to rate each of the cassettes which they had viewed on a scale of "5" to "1," with "5" indicating an excellent rating and "1" indicating a poor rating.

In addition, each student who viewed at least one cassette was asked to answer three questions concerning the value of the cassette program, once again on a five-point rating scale. The results of both these rating scales are presented in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the ratings of cassette content quality were generally quite high, with the majority of all ratings falling in the "5" or "4" range. Overall, the content ratings were slightly lower in the Spring, 1978, semester than in the Fall, 1977, semester.

Concerning the perceived value of the cassette program, 91% of the Fall students and 89% of the Spring students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the cassettes helped in their understanding of the course content.

A total of 73% of the Fall students and 64% of the Spring students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the cassettes increased their interest in developmental psychology.

Concerning the statement about making the cassettes a course requirement, the data generally indicate opposition to this idea. Perhaps since students could earn extra credit for viewing the cassettes, they wanted to maintain the concept of reward for those students who possessed the motivation to do additional work. Or the data could simply be interpreted as a preference for freedom of choice over coercion.

Discussion

It appears that the response of the developmental psychology students to the video-cassette system is highly favorable. Students are apparently helped in their understanding of the course content and also increase their interest in developmental psychology. The project director plans to continue using the video-cassette system during the 1978-1979 academic year with some minor modifications. A cassette based on an adolescent will be produced and it will replace the cassette of the seven-year-old child. This should result in greater variety in the developmental sequence of cassettes. In addition, a major revision of the study guides will be undertaken in order to introduce more discussion questions and also to elaborate on some of the tasks demonstrated in the cassettes.

Table 1
Ratings of Video-cassette Content Quality and Value of Program for Students Viewing One or More Cassettes

Cassette Content Quality	Fall, 1977 N	5 Excellent	4	3	2	1 Poor	Spring, 1978 N	5 Excellent	4	3	2	1 Poor
Cassette A	56	13%	43%	32%	11%	1%	62	13%	45%	29%	6%	6%
Cassette B	60	18	57	23	2		72	4	56	36	1	3
Cassette C	68	46	44	10			74	32	44	22	1	1
Cassette D	57	32	54	14			66	12	45	41		2
Cassette E	57	28	56	16			63	19	51	27	1	1

Value of Cassette Program	Fall, 1977 N	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree	Spring, 1978 N	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
The video-cassettes helped in my understanding of the course content.	81	34%	57%	9%			78	29%	60%	6%	3%	1%
The video-cassettes increased my interest in developmental psychology.	81	26	47	25	2		78	18	46	27	6	2
Viewing of the video-cassettes should be made a course requirement in developmental psychology.	81	17	16	31	26	10	78	5	5	40	39	10